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Evaluation

Annual report on evaluation, 2013

Summary

The present report constitutes a summary of the key elements of the annual report on evaluation 2013. It provides a brief overview of the progress made by UNDP, and associated funds and programmes, in fulfilling the evaluation functions outlined in the UNDP evaluation policy. It also presents the planned programme of work for 2014 and 2015. The full annual report on evaluation, with detailed analysis of results, will be submitted to the Executive Board in advance of the annual session of 2014.

Elements of a decision

The Executive Board may wish to: (a) take note of this summary and the full annual report; (b) request UNDP, the United Nations Capital Development Fund and the United Nations Volunteers programme to address the issues raised; and (c) approve the revised programmes of work for 2014 and proposed programmes of work for 2015.

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I. Introduction

1. The UNDP evaluation policy establishes a common institutional basis for the UNDP evaluation function, which also applies to the associated funds and programmes – the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme.

2. The present report constitutes a summary of the 2013 annual report on evaluation. The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of UNDP will annually produce and publish on its website a more extensive annual report on evaluation, which will be available prior to each annual session of the Board. This revised format offers the chance to provide a more detailed description of the evaluation-related activities carried out in 2013, and greater insight into the achievements of and challenges facing UNDP.

3. At its first regular session of 2014, the Executive Board changed the name of the UNDP Evaluation Office to the IEO in recognition of its impartial assessment role in the organization and of its reporting line directly to the Board. The present report consequently references the work of IEO.

II. Budget and human resources

4. In 2013, expenditures by the UNDP Evaluation Office (now IEO) for evaluations and other corporate-related activities totaled $8.278 million, of which $7.624 million was from regular resources and $655,000 from other resources. This represents an increase of 4.3 per cent from 2011. Ninety-four per cent of the core funding was spent.

5. The IEO has 22 staff members (16 International Professionals (IP) and six General Service (GS)); 63.6 per cent of all IEO staff and 36.3 per cent of IP staff are women. In 2013, 52 per cent of consultants hired to assist in carrying out evaluations were female. This marks a continuing upward trajectory and progress in the IEO policy to ensure gender parity. In 2012, 41 per cent of consultant hires were female, up from 32 per cent in 2010.

III. Activities in 2013

6. The primary function of IEO is to conduct independent evaluations. These evaluations support stronger accountability of UNDP to the Executive Board and to other stakeholders in the countries where the organization works. They also support learning to strengthen programming and to make UNDP a more relevant, effective and efficient organization. The year 2013 was notable for the large number of thematic and programmatic evaluations carried out in preparation for the new UNDP strategic plan.

7. IEO completed and presented three thematic evaluations to the Executive Board by IEO in 2013:

(a) evaluation of the UNDP contribution to poverty reduction (first regular session);

(b) evaluation of the UNDP role in conflict-affected countries (first regular session);

(c) evaluation of the UNDP contribution to South-South and triangular cooperation (annual session).

8. Seven programmatic evaluations were presented to the Executive Board at its annual session:

(a) evaluation of the UNDP strategic plan 2008-2013;

(b) evaluation of the fourth global programme;

(c) evaluations of the regional programmes for Africa, Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and Latin America and the Caribbean.

9. Country-level evaluations, termed assessments of development results (ADRs) were carried out in Afghanistan, Algeria, Iraq, Kenya and Sierra Leone. A planned evaluation of the work of UNDP in Lebanon was cancelled due to the Syrian crisis and the deteriorating security situation. These ADRs will be made available to the Board at the same time that the corresponding country programme documents are presented for approval.

Joint evaluations

10. With the Independent Evaluation Office of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), in 2013 the IEO began a joint evaluation of the GEF/UNDP Small Grants Programme and of the impact of UNDP/GEF support to protected areas management. Together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the IEO also commenced an evaluation of the UNDP-UNEP Poverty-Environment Initiative.

11. In 2013, IEO and the evaluation offices of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations and UNEP formed an evaluation management group for evaluating the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries. The resulting evaluation reports for each of these joint efforts will be available in 2014.

12. In 2013, IEO was a contributing partner in the first joint evaluation of joint gender programmes in the United Nations system. Starting in 2012, seven partners – UNDP, UNFPA, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the Millennium Development Goal Achievement Fund and the Governments of Norway and Spain – came together to commission and oversee the reporting effort. The evaluation was concluded in early 2014.

Review and reform of assessments of development results

13. During the second half of 2013, IEO began a review of the way it conducts country programme evaluations (ADRs), with the goal of a new independent country-level evaluation tool for UNDP. The review is broad in scope and involves rethinking the ADR so as to create a new tool that is fully aligned to the new strategic plan and the evolving work of UNDP at the country level.

14. The reform process is taking a phased approach, with the first phase in 2013 and 2014 consolidating the reforms that IEO introduced in 2013, specifically the move to having staff lead evaluations. The 2014 ADRs are following the same approach and methodology as those used in the 2013 round. By 2015, the new ADR formats will be in place. The first major output of the work will be new guidance materials and tools for conducting independent country-level evaluations in UNDP.

Evaluation Advisory Panel

15. An independent Evaluation Advisory Panel was established in 2013 to provide support and advice to IEO, in keeping with its objective to produce high-quality evaluations that help to enhance the performance of and results achieved by UNDP. The panel has 11 members who are selected through an open and competitive selection process. Panel members have been contracted to:

(a) recommend improvements to the overall coherence and consistency of the IEO approach, work programme and methodologies;

(b) review key deliverables, including guidance covering methodologies and procedures, and specific evaluation documents, i.e., terms of reference and draft and final reports;

(c) advise the IEO on ways to raise its prominence, including improvements to knowledge-sharing platforms and dissemination strategies.

Support to regional and national evaluation capacity

16. UNDP provides support for the development of national evaluation capacities, within the mandate set by the UNDP evaluation policy. The support is provided at the request of host Governments and carried out in cooperation with UNDP regional bureaux and country offices. Joint efforts with UNDP programme units are designed to bolster UNDP support to government capacity-building. The IEO work is designed to help strengthen communities of practice in evaluation. To the fullest extent possible, the evaluation capacity development work is aligned with UNDP efforts to promote South-South and triangular cooperation.

17. Since 2009, the IEO has organized biannual international conferences on national evaluation capacities. The third such conference took place in São Paulo, Brazil (29 September– 2 October 2013) and was organized in partnership with the Brazilian Secretary for Evaluation and Information Management of the Ministry of Social Development and Fight Against Hunger. The conference, which focused on solutions to challenges related to the independence, credibility and use of evaluations, brought together 160 participants from 63 countries. These included representatives of national institutions responsible for commissioning, conducting and using evaluations of public policies, projects and programmes; leading experts and practitioners; UNDP colleagues; members of academia, civil society and voluntary organizations for professional evaluation; and other United Nations and development agencies from every region.

18. The conference used a participatory approach to engage participants. Going beyond the usual discussion of evaluation issues and showcasing of best practices and innovations, participants engaged in discussions on solutions and arrived at a common list of 18 commitments aimed at promoting national evaluation capacity development. Institutions and representatives became signatories of the commitments, indicating their interest in collaborating and committing to promote development of national evaluation capacities.

19. Since the conference, IEO has followed up with participants and other interested parties on the implementation of the 18 commitments. To that end, a partnership has been developed with the UNDP International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) in Brazil to help monitor and facilitate the promotion of these commitments. IPC-IG is following up on cooperation agreements and

requests for information and support linked to the 18 commitments and towards the proposed International Year of Evaluation 2015.

Support to United Nations Evaluation Group

20. As the host of the secretariat of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), IEO provides essential financial and human resources services to UNEG. In its role as UNEG executive coordinator, IEO is the steward of the UNEG annual work plan and budget. In addition, the IEO strongly supported UNEG in the following four areas in 2013:

(a) development of the UNEG strategy for 2014-2019;

(b) enhancement of evaluation functions;

(c) participation in system-wide evaluation discussions;

(d) promotion of the importance of evaluation in and beyond the United Nations system.

IV. Decentralized evaluation quality and results

21. In this chapter, the decentralized evaluation activities of UNDP are briefly considered. The term "decentralized" is meant to take into account all evaluations commissioned by programme units and conducted by independent external experts, as distinct from evaluations commissioned and conducted by IEO.

Country office and bureau evaluation capacities

22. Past annual reports have reported on the number of monitoring and evaluation specialists as a proxy for the evaluation capacities of regional bureaux and country offices. In reality, IEO does not know how much evaluation work these specialists are doing (as opposed to supporting country office and corporate monitoring systems), what their capacities are or what the quality of the work is. The UNDP evaluation policy review team will explore this issue so that a more accurate assessment of country office and bureau capacities can be made in the future.

23. In 2013, 42 per cent of country offices reported that they have at least one monitoring and evaluation specialist, compared to 23 per cent in 2012. Whereas 55 per cent of country offices in Africa have indicated they have dedicated monitoring and evaluation specialists, only 16 per cent of country offices in Europe and the CIS indicate they have dedicated staff members for these functions. The staffing trends over the past three years are positive in three of five regions, especially in Africa, with continuing positive trends in the Asia and the Pacific and the Latin America and the Caribbean regions. The Arab States region continued a downward trend, while Europe and the CIS decreased by one position from its already significantly low base.

Evaluations commissioned by country offices and regional and policy bureaux

24. In the 2013 reporting period, 102 country offices (73 per cent) completed a total of 298 evaluations (33 outcome evaluations, 249 project evaluations and 16 other types). Similar to 2012, 30 per cent of this total were evaluations of GEF-funded projects. Compared to 2012, there was an increase of 22 per cent in the total number of evaluations conducted across the regions. Most prominently, the Africa region nearly doubled its evaluation cohort: 68 per cent of country offices conducted 89 evaluations compared to 48 evaluations conducted by 42 per cent

of country offices in 2012. The Arab States region also saw a notable upward trend in evaluations conducted, with 30 evaluations commissioned by 61 per cent of its country offices, up from 20 evaluations commissioned by 41 per cent of country offices in 2012.

25. In 2013, the regional and policy bureaux conducted 18 evaluations. The Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery completed two assessments: an evaluation of reintegration programmes; and an evaluation of support to mobile court arrangements in post-conflict situations. The Bureau for Development Policy completed six evaluations, an evaluation of gender-responsive climate change initiatives; an evaluation of UNDP efforts to promote integrated public-private partnerships for sustainable waste management; an evaluation of the Africa Adaption Programme; and three global project evaluations commissioned as an implementing partner to the GEF. Three evaluations were carried out by the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, two of which were of GEF regional projects. Seven evaluations were carried out by the Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS, four of which were regional GEF projects and all of which focused on environmental issues. The Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean completed one evaluation. The Regional Bureau for Africa and the Regional Bureau for Arab States did not complete any evaluations in 2013. It is important to note that all but four of the 18 evaluations carried out by regional and policy bureaux focused on environmental issues, and half were GEF project evaluations, carried out as required by the partnership agreement with the GEF.

Evaluation plan compliance

26. The revised UNDP evaluation policy stipulates that all evaluations included in evaluation plans are mandatory. Starting in 2011, evaluation compliance of country programmes has been measured at the end of each programme period and based on the completion of all planned evaluations during the period. Of 14 country programmes concluded in 2013, 10 (71 per cent) were fully compliant, one was not compliant and three (21 per cent) were partially compliant.

27. All evaluations that are part of bureau and country office evaluation plans are expected to have a management response. In 2013, 89 per cent of all evaluations completed received a management response compared to 97 per cent in 2012.

28. Each of the global and regional programmes is expected to include an evaluation plan. The new regional programmes for 2014-2017 include such plans. An evaluation plan for the global programme has not been developed.

Decentralized evaluation quality

29. In 2013, 179 completed outcome, programme and project-level evaluations were assessed for quality.[1] The analysis shows that 45 per cent of assessed evaluations were rated 'satisfactory' or better, 36 per cent 'moderately satisfactory' and 19 per cent 'moderately unsatisfactory' or worse.

[1] Reviews of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks, joint evaluations and midterm evaluations are not assessed, so while 298 evaluations were posted to the Evaluation Resource Centre for 2013, IEO assessed 179 outcome, programme and project evaluations, plus 44 UNDP/GEF project terminal evaluations, for a total of 223 quality assessments.

30. Positive trends are discernable. The number of moderately unsatisfactory reports has been halved since 2011, the number of evaluations considered moderately satisfactory has likewise been reduced and the number of evaluations judged to be satisfactory has increased each year and now more than doubled, to 44 per cent.

31. The positive overall trend notwithstanding, there remains significant scope for continued improvement in decentralized evaluations. In particular, concerted effort is needed to improve the quality and completeness of the terms of reference for evaluations. In addition, decentralized evaluation reports often lack a fully articulated evaluation framework. UNDP units should give greater attention to methodology, and ensure that evaluators clearly describe the evaluation approach and data collection methods. Moreover, many of the decentralized evaluations do not adequately consider whether gender equality is addressed in the project or programme being evaluated.

Quality of evaluation reports by region

32. In terms of regional distribution of evaluation reports completed in 2013, Africa represent 28 per cent of the total with 51 reports, followed by Latin American and the Caribbean (22 per cent), Europe and the CIS (20 per cent), Asia and Pacific (18 per cent) and Arab States (10 per cent). Evaluations of global programmes represent 2 per cent of the total. Reports from Africa show the most marked improvement over past years, with 53 per cent of the 2013 reports receiving a satisfactory rating, compared to 25 per cent of reports completed in 2012.

Quality of Global Environment Facility terminal evaluations

33. In 2013, UNDP completed and uploaded terminal evaluations of 44 GEF-funded projects, covering all regions and all focal areas (biodiversity, climate change mitigation and adaptation, land degradation, chemicals and international waters). The IEO assessed these evaluations for quality. Seventy-five per cent were judged to be in the range of 'moderately satisfactory' to 'highly satisfactory'. This is consistent with the results for the 64 evaluations completed in 2012 (many of which were assessed in 2013), 75 per cent falling in the same range. These results are slightly lower than those reported for 2009-2010 (83 per cent) and 2010-2011 (81 per cent). However, changes made to the UNDP/GEF evaluation guidance and to the quality assessment tool in 2012 account for some of the differences between 2012- 2013 and prior years.

Challenges to evaluation quality

34. When asked to identify key challenges and constraints on decentralized evaluation quality, several UNDP regional monitoring and evaluation advisors listed the following:

(a) despite advances in promoting an evaluation culture across UNDP, there remains a lack of dedicated monitoring and evaluation staff in some country offices, and evaluations are typically underresourced in terms of time and financial resources allocated to evaluation processes;

(b) there is a tendency to focus on the compliance aspects of monitoring and evaluation rather than using it as a tool for comprehensive project planning. Consequently, evaluations and their management responses are often seen as a "required step" rather than a substantive activity to stimulate dialogue with key counterparts, and inform the development of future projects and programmes;

(c) there is often insufficient attention paid in the programming cycle to setting strategic frameworks, the theory of change, identifying realistic indicators and establishing baseline data;

(d) in many countries, there remains a relative scarcity of competent, experienced and objective national evaluators;

(e) there is often a low level of commitment from counterparts (government and/or others) to engage fully in the programming cycle and take ownership of evaluation results.

V. Evaluation planning, 2014 – 2015

35. An evaluation plan for the period 2014-2017 was developed in 2013 and approved by the Executive Board at the first regular session of 2014. The plan continues to be rolled out as agreed with the Board. This chapter sets out the planned and proposed activities to be carried out by IEO in 2014 and 2015.

36. The approved plan includes the expectation of one additional thematic evaluation still to be selected, covering an institutional effectiveness theme related to section 5 of the strategic plan. The IEO is now discussing the specifics with UNDP management. The suggested topic will be presented to the Board for approval at the annual session of 2014. The analysis will be completed and presented to the Board at the first regular session of 2017.

Programme of work for 2014

37. The IEO programme of work for 2014 is funded under the 2013-2014 biennial support budget. It envisions completing the thematic and impact evaluations started in 2013; conducting six ADRs; coordinating with UNDP management to develop guidance for decentralized evaluations; and supporting revisions to the evaluation policy.

38. The independent review of the UNDP evaluation policy will conclude in 2014. Recommendations will be provided informally to the Executive Board during the second regular session of 2014.

39. Six ADRs have been launched in 2014, focused on UNDP support to Armenia, Malaysia, Somalia, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay and Zimbabwe. Continuing from 2013, the IEO will continue its thorough review of the evaluation methodologies used in carrying out ADRs with a view to strengthening UNDP county-level evaluation and aligning the process to the new strategic plan. The resulting recommendations on ADR revisions will be incorporated into ADR planning for 2015 and beyond.

Proposed programme of work for 2015

40. The proposed programme of work for 2015 is based on the expected allocation of resources to IEO in the 2014-2015 biennial budget. It is important to note that the 2015 work plan may be affected by recommendations from the evaluation policy review, the continuing evolution of the new UNDP strategic plan and any institutional changes stemming from the UNDP structural review.

41. The current proposal includes completing the following six thematic and impact evaluations started in 2013-2014:

(a) *Evaluation of the contribution of UNDP Human Development Reports* (HDRs) (first regular session 2015). The scope of the evaluation will cover global and regional HDRs;

(b) *The impact of UNDP support to protected areas management* (first regular session 2015). The evaluation is in progress, jointly managed by the evaluation offices of UNDP and GEF;

(c) *Joint GEF/UNDP Small Grants Programme Evaluation* (first regular session 2015). The evaluation is being carried out in two phases, the first of which was completed in November 2013;

(d) *Evaluation of the UNDP contribution to gender equality* (annual session 2015). Following the 2006 evaluation of gender mainstreaming in UNDP, this evaluation focuses on the overall contribution of UNDP to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment;

(e) *Evaluation of the role of UNDP in supporting national achievement of the Millennium Development Goals* (annual session 2015). The evaluation will focus on the tools and initiatives provided by UNDP in support of government and civil society efforts to fulfil the Goals;

(f) *The impact of UNDP support to mine action.* The evaluation will focus on UNDP support to countries to reduce the threat and impact of landmines and explosive remnants of war. Originally planned for the annual session 2015, it will be delayed due to work load and human resource constraints, and is now planned for the second regular session 2015.

42. The IEO plans to conduct 10 country-level evaluations (ADRs) in 2015.

43. The next in the series of international conferences on national evaluation capacity will take place in 2015 in the Asia and Pacific region in a partner country still to be determined.

44. The IEO will continue its ongoing corporate and learning functions, including support to decentralized evaluation and the preparation of evaluation guidance.

45. The IEO looks forward to consultations with the Executive Board and UNDP management on revisions to the proposed programme in line with evolving strategies and operational realities.

VI. Evaluation activities of the United Nations Capital Development Fund

46. The UNCDF budget for evaluation in 2013 was $547,944, drawn from core and non-core resources. During 2013, UNCDF completed:

(a) a midterm evaluation of the YouthStart programme focused on helping microfinance institutions design and deliver financial services for young people;

(b) a final evaluation assessing the performance of the Gender Equitable Local Development Programme, a joint programme implemented together with UN-Women, which focused on increasing access by women to local government services in five countries in Africa;

(c) a final evaluation of the results of a decentralization and local development programme intended to pilot a district development fund mechanism in Liberia.

47. In 2013, the UNCDF Evaluation Unit continued its dual focus on overseeing a separate evaluation function reporting directly to the Executive Secretary and in supporting programme colleagues to integrate evaluation approaches into programme design and oversight.

48. The Evaluation Unit was fully involved in the development of the new strategic framework 2014-2017 and accompanying integrated results and resources matrix; and was active in proposing an improved measurement system within UNCDF to include external evaluation, self-evaluation techniques such as programme reviews, and results-focused programme design and monitoring.

49. For 2014, the unit will continue to use where possible resources from project budgets to support evaluation management and oversight. The recruitment of three new monitoring and evaluation officers in each of the UNCDF regional offices will also help the unit to manage an increased volume of evaluations planned for 2014 and 2015.

VII. Evaluation activities of United Nations Volunteers

50. In 2013 the UNV Evaluation Unit had 2.5 staff including the chief (P-4, core-funded), an evaluation specialist (P-3, extrabudgetary-funded) and a part-time administrative assistant (GS-4, extrabudgetary-funded). The total operational budget of the Evaluation Unit amounted to $407,500, 49 per cent more than in 2012.

51. A major evaluation managed by UNV in 2013 is the summative evaluation of the UNV contribution to volunteer infrastructures. Although support for the development of volunteer schemes in partner countries is a core area of UNV activities, it had never been evaluated before.

52. The Evaluation Unit was actively involved in the development of the first UNV strategic framework (2014-2017). Specific technical assistance was provided on the formulation of outcomes and related indicators, together with strengthening the accompanying integrated results and resources matrix. The new framework provides the Evaluation Unit with both a challenge and opportunity to reconsider the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation function and reposition itself to better support the UNV mandate and priorities.